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City/County Building (Wilmington Public Building)
1000 King Street
Wilmington
New Castle
Delaware

HABS No. DE-102

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

Wilmington City/County Building

Name: The City/County Building, Wilmington Public Building

Location: 1000 King Street, Wilmington, New Castle County, Delaware, bounded by Tenth, 11th and French Streets, facing King Street

Present Owner: - State of Delaware

Occupant: Chancery, Common Pleas, Municipal, JP, and Superior Courts, Offices of the Attorney General, City Solicitor, and Public Defender, Wilmington Police Department, Sheriff's Office, and the Delaware Bar Association, etc.

Use: Public Office and Court House facility

Statement of Significance:

The old City/County Building at 1000 King Street, along with the other buildings facing Rodney Square and the Square itself, are the architectural and historic hallmarks of Wilmington during the first quarter of this century. The development of Rodney Square as the public center of downtown Wilmington was due largely to the enlightened efforts of such prominent Delawareans as Pierre S. du Pont, President of the DuPont Company, and John J. Raskob, Corporate Secretary of the Company. Raskob conceived the idea of a joint City/County structure and coordinated the land acquisition and design competition for the building.

As one of the four buildings facing Rodney Square, the City/County Building is an integral unit of one of the City's earliest attempts at the planning of public space. The development of the Square in general, and the neo-classical design of the City/County Building in particular, are indicative of trends that originated during the City Beautiful Movement.

Part 1. Historical Information

A. Physical History

1. Date of Erection. 1914-1917
2. Architect.

In February of 1914, the Building Commission for the City/County Building at 1000 King Street held a competition to decide which architectural firm would be awarded the Commission. This competition was restricted to 11 firms, three of which were specifically invited to submit designs. Warren P. Laird, Professor of Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, judged the competition and awarded the commission to the Palmer, Hornbostel and Jones firm of New York.

3. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers.

No information available.

4. Original plans.

The program of competition guidelines for the City/County Building did not dictate any particular style for the building, but did specify that towers and domes were not desired. The guidelines required that the facade of the building "give the effect of a single edifice." Originally, the wings of the building were set two bays within the main building. At the King Street level, the County wing was three and one-half stories; the City wing, one and one-half stories. A main element of the interior of the building was a wide vaulted arcade of pink marble and Indiana limestone which linked the City and County sections. This area is now courtroom space.

5. Alterations and Additions.

In June of 1960, plans were announced to enlarge the wing of the County side of the building. Whiteside, Moeckel and Carbonell, a local firm, were the architects for the project. Another three and one-half story section was added to the existing northern wing to bring the wing's outside wall even with that of the main building. The original stone facing was retained from the old wall and used to cover the new wall. Ninety percent of the wall surface was covered with the original stone, while the remaining ten percent was new material. A new roof covered both the old and new sections of the wing. The addition was designed to accommodate additional floors on top of the structure. The interior of the original wing was renovated and modernized at this time. The large vaulted main corridor of the building was altered in 1974 and the area converted to courtroom space. In 1980, the southern wing was enlarged with a modern granite addition for the City Police Department. Daniel Koffler and Associates were the architects for the project and Ventresca Brothers, Inc., the contractor.

Between 1981 and 1984, the building will undergo substantial alterations and renovations at an estimated cost of \$12,000,000. Contracts have been awarded to Diamond McCune (architects and engineers) and Healy/Mellon-Staurt (construction). The facade of the building will remain intact.

Historical Context:

By the early 1900s, Wilmington had long outgrown the facilities of Old Town Hall on Market Street and City offices had been

spread throughout three buildings. New Castle County faced a similar dilemma. In 1912, John J. Raskob, then secretary to Pierre S. du Pont, proposed that the two governments could best and most economically alleviate their respective space problems by building a joint structure. P. S. du Pont, who at that time was Treasurer of the DuPont Company, had been spearheading the development of the Rodney Square area as Wilmington's civic center since 1905. To further this development, Raskob convinced the City and County to construct a building which would face on to the western side of the Square. To guarantee the construction of the building on the site, Raskob obtained options on the individual properties on the lot before petitioning the two governments.

Raskob was also among the prominent Wilmington businessmen who sat on the Building Commission for the proposed City/County Building. The Commission outlined specifications for the building and coordinated the design competition. The firm of Palmer, Hornbostel and Jones of New York won the design competition. Artist Charles Keck, also of New York, was commissioned to engrave the City and County seals on the face of the building. Construction of the City/County Building began in 1914 and the building was completed in 1917. The State of Delaware acquired the building in July of 1980. The building still functions as a court facility. In the meantime, City and County offices had moved to their newly constructed facility at 800 French Street by 1976/1977.

Part II. Architectural Information

Exterior Description:

1000 King Street is a granite neo-classical building of steel frame construction with a U-shaped plan. The main facade of the building has two main entrances, which are separated by a colonnade of nine fluted corinthian columns. Behind these columns are three levels of modern casement windows of graduated sizes. At the two identical entrances, two-story double corinthian pilasters support a pediment. The large glass and metal double doors (circa 1950 to 1960) of the entrance are set within fluted ionic single-story columns which support a decorative entablature. Above the entablature are large arched transoms with decorative lead glass windows. Relief sculpture and the County and City seals are above the transom. Two bays extend beyond the main entranceways on either side. A molded entablature and balustrade run the length of the building's cornice. A shallow flat roof rises out of the main roof of the building. At the extreme ends of the secondary roof are two shallow copper hipped roofs. These hipped roofs are topped by open cupolas with slim needle-like spires which serve as flagpoles. A clerestory links the two hipped roofs and provides natural light to the interior. The wings of the U-shaped plan extend down the gentle slope of a hill revealing a lower story. On the French Street side, six levels are visible. The northern wing (addition) extends nine bays behind the main building. The windowless southern wing is a modern addition of gray and white granite.

A modern service core sits within the hollow of the U. The facade of the building does not reveal that there are two separate buildings within. The lowest story, at the French Street level, is continuous, however.

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Interior Description:

While the facade of 1000 King Street gives the impression of a single ediface, the interior plan was devised to serve the particular needs of the two separate governments. As originally planned, the City Hall section of the building would be 41,750 square feet, while the County section would be 31,700 feet. The lobbies of the two sections are identical in size and design. Each lobby is an open octagonal well which reveals the three levels of the building from the King Street ground floor to the third floor. A broadly curved short flight of steps leads into other areas of the building. In the area behind the well is a graceful elliptical staircase. Leaded skylights adorn the ceiling area above the staircase. Offices are dispersed throughout the well area on each level. The ceiling area above the well is domed with semi-circular windows and molding around the base of the dome. Brass fixtures and marble tiling are used throughout the lobby areas. Elevators are located around the walls of the lobby. As originally constructed, a two-story arched central corridor lined with offices linked the two lobbies. This area was rebuilt in 1974 and the corridor replaced by a smaller corridor along the front of the building. The area between the two lobbies is now divided into courtroom space.

Throughout the history of the building, the office spaces have been continually altered to serve the changing needs of the two governments. Few details of the original interior remain intact except the lobbies and stair wells.

Site:

The City/County Building faces northwest. A flight of stairs almost the width of the building leads directly from the building onto King Street. The City/County Building is part of an ensemble of buildings bounding Rodney Square, which includes the Wilmington Institute Free Library, the United States Post Office, and the Hotel DuPont. These buildings are architecturally harmonious in color, scale, and proportion. The building looks upon the greenery of Rodney Square and the two entrances of the building are visually extended by the Rodney Square walkways. Shrubbery lines the area between the building on the sides of Tenth and 11th Streets. At the rear of the building on French Street is a parking lot.

Part III. Sources of Information

Bibliography

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The Public Building - Main Corridor - May 31, 1916

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MAIN CORRIDOR
MAY 31, 1916.